

USACHPPM
HEALTH INFORMATION OPERATIONS (HIO) UPDATE

21 May 2004

The HIO Update provides information regarding global medical and veterinary issues of interest to the United States (US) Army. The update does not attempt to analyze the information regarding potential strategic or tactical impact to the US Army and as such, should not be regarded as a medical intelligence product. Medical intelligence products are available at <http://mic.afmic.detrick.army.mil/>. The information in the HIO Update should provide an increased awareness of current and emerging health-related issues.

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HOT TOPICS

Advances Emerging in Hepatitis Management

17 May - EurekAlert reported that hepatitis, a potentially serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver, is a major problem worldwide. According to current estimates, coinfection with [hepatitis C](#) virus (HCV) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a major worldwide public health problem. Researchers in the VA Healthcare System examined the proportion of chronic HCV-infected patients who had been tested for HIV and related risk factors and found that improved screening programs are needed. Of the 4,364 HCV RNA positive patients, 77.9 percent had been tested for HIV. Among the HCV-infected patients who were tested for HIV, 8.4 percent were positive. Current therapies for hepatitis C virus (HCV) have considerable side effects and induce a sustained virologic response in less than half of patients infected. In another study, researchers from Bach and Godofsky found that a novel hepatitis therapy, NM283, has consistent antiviral activity and is well tolerated in HCV-1 infected chronic hepatitis C patients. Patients who contract the [hepatitis B](#) virus can experience a brief, acute illness or a chronic, life-long infection. Those with chronic hepatitis B (HBV) can have serious complications such as cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer. Until now, it has been difficult to identify HBV patients who are likely to develop complications. A team of doctors from the University of Michigan reported that they have developed a set of models to detect inflammation and fibrosis in the liver without the need for a liver biopsy. [View Article](#)

Antagonistic Antibody Prevents Lethal Shock-Like Syndromes

17 May - EurekAlert reported that immune system failure to limit the spread of a bacterial infection results in [sepsis](#): a loss of control on the normal inflammatory response, leading to tissue damage, increased vascular permeability, and finally multi-organ failure and shock. The death rate for sepsis patients is in the range of 70%, and the health-care sticker price for such runaway infections is around \$15 billion annually in the US alone. Strategies for treating septic shock are aimed at limiting the inflammatory response, as treatments to directly reduce the bacterial infection, such as the use of antibiotics, can result in furthering the already out-of-control inflammatory response. Now, Carlson Kirschning and colleagues, from the Technical University of Munich, have tested a new therapeutic possibility by creating antibodies directed against the receptor to which bacteria bind in order to infect the cell. The strategy here, therefore, is to interrupt the initial step of septic inflammation. They showed that use of antibodies against the toll-like receptor 2 blocked the release of markers of the inflammatory response and protected the mice from a lethal shock-like syndrome. The results here indicate the potential suitability for antibody-directed therapy in treating septic shock. [View Source](#)

Cholesterol Drugs Promising for Multiple Sclerosis

14 May – Reuters reported cholesterol-lowering drugs, widely used to reduce the risk of heart attack, could also be effective in treating [multiple sclerosis](#). The news underscores the reputation of statins as potential miracle pills to rival aspirin. Now researchers from the Medical University of South Carolina have produced the first clinical evidence that statins can help in multiple sclerosis. A group of 30 patients with MS were given 80 mg a day of Zocor, or simvastatin, and had a 44% reduction in brain lesions after three months of treatment, the study showed. But Professor Chris Polman, an MS expert at the VU Medical Center in Amsterdam, said more research was needed, including a large placebo-controlled clinical trial. "It's a very good start but it's not conclusive," Polman said in a telephone interview, adding it was possible some brain lesions may have disappeared spontaneously, given the relapsing-remitting nature of the disease. [View Article](#)

E-Patients Are a Valuable Resource

13 May - EurekAlert reported that many patients say that the medical information and guidance they can find online is more complete and useful than they receive from their clinicians. The authors argue that e-patients need to be recognized as a valuable resource that could provide sustainable healthcare solutions. About half of adults in the United States have looked for health information on the net, yet many clinicians underestimate the benefits and overestimate the risks of online health resources for patients. Reports of patients coming to harm as the result of online advice are rare, whereas accounts of those who have obtained better care, averted medical mistakes, or saved their own lives are common. The authors conclude: "...e-patients can be recognized as a valuable new type of renewable resource – managing much of their own care, providing care for others, helping professionals improve the quality of their services, and participating in collaborations between patients and professionals." [View Article](#)

Exercise Lowers Employers' Health Costs

14 May – Reuters reported companies can save millions in health-care costs simply by encouraging their employees to exercise a little bit, researchers reported. They said obese employees have higher health-care costs, but lowered those expenses by exercising just a couple of times a week -- without even losing any weight. Researchers studied 23,500 workers at General Motors. They estimated that getting the most sedentary obese workers to exercise would have saved about \$790,000 a year, or about 1.5 percent of health-care costs for the whole group. Company-wide, the potential savings could reach \$7.1 million per year, they reported in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. Of the whole group of workers, about 30 percent were of normal weight, 45 percent were overweight, and 25 percent were obese. Annual health-care costs averaged \$2,200 for normal weight, \$2,400 for the overweight, and \$2,700 for obese employees. But among workers who did no exercise, health-care costs went up by at least \$100 a year, and were \$3,000 a year for obese employees who were sedentary. Adding two or more days of light exercise -- at least 20 minutes of exercise or work hard enough to increase heart rate and breathing -- lowered costs by on average \$500 per employee a year. [View Article](#)

Genes May Be Linked to Fatigue in Gulf War Veterans

13 May - EurekAlert reported that [Chronic Fatigue Syndrome](#) (CFS) is nearly four times as common in veterans of the first Persian Gulf War as in nonveterans, according to a new study. The study examined the possibility that genetic factors may play a role in developing the disease. Fatigue that has no known medical cause, lasts more than six months, produces a substantial decrease of activity and is accompanied by symptoms associated with infection, as well as rheumatological, and neuropsychiatric symptoms, is known as CFS; idiopathic chronic fatigue (ICF) is fatigue without other

symptoms or identifiable cause. Gulf War veterans with CFS/ICF showed a higher prevalence of the D variant in the DCP1 gene. Veterans with the DD genotype (which has been associated with alcoholism and cardiac disease) were 8 times more likely to develop CFS or ICF than those with the lower prevalence II genotype. These results suggest that there may be an interaction between these genetic variants and some factor unique to deployment to the Persian Gulf. If they are supported by future research examining veterans of different wars and war zones, it may be that variants of the ACE gene could be a biological marker for increased risk of war-related illness. [View the Full Study](#)

Homocysteine Levels Linked with Fracture Risk

13 May - Reuters reported high levels of homocysteine, an amino acid linked to heart disease, appear to increase the risk of fracture in individuals with [osteoporosis](#), even when bone mineral density is normal. Researchers examined the association between homocysteine levels and the risk of osteoporotic fracture in 2406 subjects age 55 and older. They found the risk of fracture increased with homocysteine levels, after adjusting the data for factors such as age, gender, body mass index, smoking status and history of recent falls. Fracture risk was not associated with bone mineral density or gender. The likelihood of fracture was doubled in subjects with the highest homocysteine levels compared with those with lower levels. The relationship between high homocysteine levels and fracture was similar to the association between fracture risk and low bone mineral density, cognitive impairment, and recent falls, the research team reports. In another study, researchers tallied hip fractures for 1999 participants in the Framingham Study, ages 59 to 91 years. Similarly, they found that risk of hip fracture increased in both men and women as homocysteine levels increased. [View Article](#)

Imaging Study Shows Brain Maturing

17 May - EurekAlert reported that the brain's center of reasoning and problem solving is among the last to mature, a new study graphically reveals. The decade-long magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) study of normal brain development, from ages 4 to 21, by researchers at NIH's National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) shows that such "higher-order" brain centers, such as the prefrontal cortex, don't fully develop until young adulthood. The new study found that the first areas to mature (e.g., extreme front and back of the brain) are those with the most basic functions, such as processing the senses and movement. Areas involved in spatial orientation and language (parietal lobes) follow. Areas with more advanced functions -- integrating information from the senses, reasoning and other "executive" functions (prefrontal cortex) -- mature last. [View Article](#)

Low-Carb Diet More Effective than Low-Fat Diet

17 May - EurekAlert reported that people who followed a low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet lost more weight than people on a low-fat, low-cholesterol, low-calorie diet during a six-month comparison study at Duke University Medical Center. However, the researchers caution that people with medical conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure should not start the diet without close medical supervision. The study is the first randomized, controlled trial of an Atkins-style diet approach, which includes vitamin and nutritional supplements. Along with losing an average of 26 pounds, dieters assigned to the low-carbohydrate plan lost more body fat, and lowered their triglyceride levels and raised their HDL, or good cholesterol, more than the low-fat dieters. The low-fat dieters lost an average of 14 pounds. Though the low-fat diet group lowered their total cholesterol more than the low-carb dieters, the latter group nearly halved their triglycerides and their HDL jumped five points. The low-carbohydrate group reported more adverse physical effects, such as constipation and headaches, but fewer people dropped out of the low-carbohydrate diet than the low-fat diet. [View Article](#)

Predictors of Arthritis Remission Identified

14 May – Reuters reported French researchers have identified markers of disease activity and scores on X-ray imaging that predict remission in patients with early [rheumatoid arthritis](#). The results indicate that factors that predict remission in patients in the early stages of rheumatoid arthritis are mainly disease activity score, clinical symptoms of disease activity and X-ray scores. The research is reported in the Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases. [View Article](#)

Psychological Factors May Be Root of Back Pain

15 May - EurekAlert reported that when it comes to [back pain](#), psychological distress is a more reliable predictor of the problem than imaging and diagnostic disc injection. The finding could affect how doctors treat back pain. Most adults in the United States will experience disabling lower back pain at least once in their lives, but their doctors frequently can't find a specific physical cause. In a four-year investigation that followed patients who initially had no lower back pain, researchers studied their subjects' spines using both disc injection and magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI. And they also got to know their research subjects through psychological evaluations. It turned out that psychological factors more accurately predicted who would develop lower back pain than the two diagnostic techniques. The researchers found that patients with poor coping skills or with chronic pain were nearly three times more likely to develop back pain compared to those with neither. A history of disputed workers' compensation claims also predicted future back pain. Meanwhile, a crack in the disc or a "high-intensity zone" seen on MRI was weakly associated with back pain, but the result was not statistically significant. [View Article](#)

Rectal Artesunate as Initial Treatment for Moderate to Severe Malaria

13 May - EurekAlert reported that people with moderate to severe [malaria](#) who are too ill to take oral medication can benefit from a single dose of rectal artesunate as initial treatment. Many people with severe malaria cannot take medicines orally, and delay in injectable treatment can be fatal. Researchers assessed 109 children and 35 adults who were randomly assigned to rectal artesunate (single dose of about 10 mg/kg bodyweight) or quinine treatment (standard doses) given by intramuscular injections. Twelve hours after treatment, more than 90% of children and adults given rectal artesunate achieved reductions of over one-third in parasite concentrations. Only 14% of children and 38% of adults given quinine achieved similar reductions. [View Source](#)

Scents Will Not Rouse Us from Slumber

17 May - EurekAlert reported that while sound can disrupt sleep, scents cannot. People cannot rely on their sense of smell to awaken them to the danger of fire. Study participants easily detected odors when awake and in the early transition into sleep (Stage One sleep) but, once asleep, did not. The findings indicate a significant alteration of perceptual processing as a function of sleep. Researchers studied the effects of two scents – the pleasurable peppermint and offensive pyridine. The odors were tested during moderately deep Stage Two sleep, deep Stage Four sleep and REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. No one responded to peppermint during sleep. Responses to the intense and noxious pyridine were infrequent and did not wake any participants in the deepest stage of sleep. Pyridine is a component of coal tar and used as an herbicide for firewood, and thus a likely byproduct of many real fires, according to the authors. However, sound woke the participants regardless of the sleep stage. A moderately loud auditory tone produced arousal from sleep virtually every time the scents did not. [View Source](#)

The UV Advantage

18 May - EurekAlert reported that Dr. Michael F. Holick, a professor of medicine, physiology, and biophysics at the Boston University School of Medicine, is directly challenging the conventional thinking of the medical establishment by demonstrating how moderate exposure to sun has powerful health benefits. Dr. Holick is considered by many to be one of the nation's foremost authority on vitamin D. Dr. Holick said, "Forty to sixty percent of Americans are seasonally or chronically vitamin D deficient. Many who practice dermatology and their supporters in the sunscreen industry have scared the public right out of the sun, the best way to produce the vitamin D the body needs." Holick cautioned, "There is no doubt vitamin D is the best way for the body to control abnormal cell growth which could lead to: improved bone health; reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer; alleviation of skin disorders; decreased risk of autoimmune disorders; and enhanced mental health.

[View Article](#)

Worldwide Increase in Diabetes Forecasts Renal Disease Explosion

17 May - EurekAlert reported that an analysis of demographic data collected on European and American patients participating in studies for a new non-calcium phosphate binder show striking differences between the causes of renal failure: 14% of European renal failure patients had [diabetes](#) as their primary diagnosis, whereas 34% of US patients had this diagnosis. If, as expected by many experts, the incidence of diabetes in Europe grows to match that of the US, demand for renal replacement therapy in end stage renal disease (ESRD) could escalate sharply. "To help our patients stay well, for as long as possible while on dialysis, there is a pressing need for new and effective treatments like FOSRENOL to help us manage serious complications such as hyperphosphataemia", concluded Dr Alastair Hutchison, Manchester Institute of Nephrology & Transplantation, UK, who led the European study. [View Article](#)

Focus on Epidemiology

Cardiac Complications from Smallpox Vaccination

13 May - EurekAlert reported that while adverse reactions from [smallpox vaccinations](#) given to military personnel in the wake of renewed threats of bioterrorism remain minimal, the rate of cardiac complications has been higher than expected. The Department of Defense Smallpox Vaccination Program reported over 50 cases to date of myopericarditis – inflammation of the heart muscle or of the sac surrounding the heart – following vaccination. "The rates of non-cardiac side effects, most of them quite mild, were at or below historic rates," said Dimitri C. Cassimatis, M.D., first author of the review and cardiology fellow at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. "The rate of cardiac complications, however, has been higher than expected. The individuals experiencing complications have responded well to therapy and almost all revert to normal," said Dr. Cassimatis. "More serious cardiac events, such as heart attacks and arrhythmias have not occurred at a rate greater than you would expect in this size population. The U.S. Department of Defense resumed smallpox vaccination of military personnel in December 2002. As of June 2003, more than 450,000 military personnel have been vaccinated and carefully followed to identify and manage any adverse reactions to the vaccine. The Vaccine Health Care Center has systems in place to monitor and keep records of any adverse side effects resulting from any vaccination, including smallpox, according to Dr. Cassimatis. Dr. Renata Engler, who spearheaded the creation of the Vaccine Health Care Center and is the chief of allergy and immunology here at Walter Reed, was familiar with the European literature and alerted us to the possibility of myopericarditis. As a result we were ready to monitor and treat anyone who developed this problem," Dr. Cassimatis. [View Source](#)

DoD-GEIS: Avian Influenza Update

17 May - Beginning late in 2003 until now, 34 human cases of [avian influenza](#) (AI) A (H5N1) with 23 deaths have been reported in Asia. There have also been recent AI outbreaks of [A (H5N2) and (H7)] reported in Asia, Canada and the U.S., but no severe human infection with these strains. No human-to-human spread has been documented. WHO has released an assessment of human health risk from outbreaks of highly pathogenic (HP) AI A (H5N1) in poultry. In January, 2004, WHO activated the influenza pandemic preparedness plan in response to confirmed human cases of AI A (H5N1) linked to outbreaks in poultry in Vietnam and Thailand. From December 2003 - February 2004, outbreaks of H5N1 in poultry were also reported in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, and the Republic of Korea. WHO describes the outbreaks as unprecedented in geographic scope, international spread, and economic consequences. This AI strain has shown the capacity to infect humans and cause severe disease on three separate occasions from 1997 to the present; the 2004 outbreak in humans was the largest ever recorded. A major concern is that a new virus subtype with pandemic potential could emerge as a result of widespread AI in poultry. AI control efforts including culling of more than 100 million birds have reduced the risk to humans but the risk remains as long as this strain circulates in domestic poultry. WHO notes that in several affected countries, surveillance and reporting systems, human and animal, are weak; the apparent absence of recent reported human cases and announcements about the end of outbreaks are not reassuring. WHO recommends continuing work to eliminate poultry H5N1, reporting of new outbreaks to relevant authorities and organizations, putting in place mechanisms to verify control progress, ensuring close collaboration (public health, agricultural and veterinary services), disease surveillance in humans and sharing viruses with laboratories in the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network. DoD's influenza surveillance program, collaborating with the CDC and WHO, supports the global effort to identify and isolate novel influenza strains infecting humans and develop effective prevention measures, including vaccines. More information on influenza and other key surveillance and response programs are available at [DoD-GEISWeb](#).

USCENTCOM

Pakistan: 3 Die of Suspected Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever

17 May – ProMED reported that people have died recently while four others have been admitted to the hospital with suspected [Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever](#) (CCHF) in the south western province of Baluchistan in the latest outbreak of the illness that has plagued the largest, and poorest, of Pakistan's provinces. "Three have died and 4 have recovered," said Dr. Shafi Zehri, the provincial health secretary. A severe disease, CCHF can be caused by a tick bite or contact with an infected animal or person. The infected person becomes ill with fever, dizziness, neck pain, aching muscles and stiffness, and recurrent headaches within a few days. Soon, the volume of blood platelets falls and bleeding begins. Without treatment, a patient can bleed to death. A total of 231 cases of CCGF have been reported in Baluchistan since 2001. There is no vaccine against the virus. About 30% of people who contract the disease can die even after receiving medical treatment. CCHF is an especially big problem in neighboring Afghanistan, where outbreaks can occur when the weather turns warmer, because of an increasing tick population. [View Source](#)

Roadside Bomb Containing Sarin Explodes in Iraq

17 May – Global Security Newswire reported two soldiers were treated for 'minor exposure' to [sarin](#) after a bomb containing the nerve agent exploded near a U.S. military convoy in Iraq, military

authorities said today. The incident involved a binary-type 155-millimeter artillery shell in which two separate chemicals are mixed together after the shell is fired to produce sarin, said Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, the U.S. chief military spokesman in Iraq. Two members of an explosive ordnance team were treated after the agent release. [View Article](#)

Undiagnosed Deaths, Children - Kenya (Makueni)

13 May – ProMED reported that at least 20 children have died of a mysterious disease in Masongaleni Location in Kibwezi Division in the past week. The Makueni District Medical Officer of Health, Dr Joseph Mwangi and his deputy Joseph Matheka, said the children were between five and 10 years old. The officers said they suspected the disease could be Hepatitis B. They said the symptoms include extended stomach, fever and jaundice of the eyes. Matheka said samples of maize, beans and the flour indicated the children might have eaten contaminated food. Mwangi said isolated cases of the disease had been reported in the neighboring Makindu Division, with unconfirmed reports indicating a similar outbreak in Kitui District. Local leaders appealed to the Government to send more medical personnel to the area to check the spread of the disease. The district health boss warned the locals against using traditional herbs, saying this was complicating the situation. [View Article](#)

US Agency Helps Rebuild Sudan's Health Care System

13 May – VOA News reported top officials from the U.S. Agency for International Development are in southern Sudan to help start rebuilding the country's shattered health care system after more than two decades of civil war. The U.S. aid agency pledged more than \$30 million during the next five years to build health clinics, train medical workers and provide drugs to combat a range of diseases, including [malaria](#) and [tuberculosis](#). These diseases have flourished during Sudan's 21 years of brutal conflict. Functioning hospitals and health centers are rare in southern Sudan, where government soldiers and rebel troops looted and destroyed many such facilities. The aid package is one of the first major steps in rebuilding the health infrastructure in that war-devastated region of the country and it comes as negotiators for the Khartoum government and rebels in southern Sudan close in on a peace deal to end Africa's longest-running conflict. [View Article](#)

USEUCOM

Burkina Faso: Government Confirms Yellow Fever Outbreak

13 May – ProMED reported the government of Burkina Faso said 25 suspected cases of [yellow fever](#) had been reported in the southeastern city of Bobo-Dioulasso and the nearby town of Gaoua, which is close to the border with Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. Four cases had been confirmed. A Ministry of Health official said that 16 blood samples had been collected from the suspected victims of the mosquito-borne disease. Laboratory tests carried out by the Pasteur Institute in Dakar Senegal had so far confirmed 4 cases of yellow fever among them. [View Article](#)

England: Norovirus Outbreak at Holiday Village on the Isle of Wight

18 May – ProMED reported that about 100 pensioners from Shropshire who were heading to the Isle of Wight by coach were forced to turn around and return home after a contagious virus swept through the holiday village where they were due to be staying. They set off for the Isle of Wight but the coaches pulled over in Berkshire to make an emergency announcement. A representative from the Coach Holiday Warehouse in Cheltenham, which had organized the holiday, drove to the service

station and told passengers the bad news. They were told that a [norovirus](#) infection had swept through Harcourt Sands and 18 per cent of people who had stayed at the complex over the weekend had come down with it. [View Article](#)

Newcastle Disease Affects Wild Birds in Russian Far East

19 May – ProMED reported that a growing number of wild birds in the Russian Far East region of Khabarovsk are catching an acute viral disease known as [Newcastle disease](#). Birds of several species, including grouse, are rarely sighted there now because so many are dying from the disease said Leonid Ivanov, a local official. "Tests show that the Newcastle disease virus is not only circulating in wild species but also among pet birds and pigeons," he said. Ivanov added that Newcastle disease, or pneumoencephalitis, could prove just as devastating for poultry stocks as bird flu, which has led to the culling of millions of chickens worldwide. The two diseases produce similar symptoms. The health authorities in Khabarovsk have urged poultry farmers to have their birds vaccinated. [View Source](#)

Pet Passports Lead to Surge in Dogs Dying from Foreign Diseases

18 May – ProMED reported that a growing number of British pets are catching deadly diseases on foreign holidays, as more animals travel with their owners on the "pets' passports" scheme introduced four years ago. The School of Tropical Medicine in Liverpool said that reported cases of some animal diseases picked up on holiday had doubled since 2002. During 2003, 37 pet dogs -- almost half of the 84 tested at the school -- were found to have [leishmaniasis](#), an incurable disease passed on by sand flies in Mediterranean countries. The figure is more than double the 17 dogs that caught the disease on holidays in 2002. Symptoms include weight loss, eye disease, and kidney failure. Other diseases that have shown increases of about 100 percent include [babesiosis](#) and [ehrlichiosis](#) -- blood diseases spread by ticks -- and heartworm, a parasite passed on by mosquitoes. [View Article](#)

Q Fever - Bosnia & Herzegovina (Banja Luka)

12 May – ProMED reported that an epidemic of Q fever has been reported in the area of Banja Luka. Since 7 May 2004, 75 patients with symptoms of Q fever have been reported. To date, 38 patients have been admitted for treatment at the Clinic for Infectious Diseases of the Banja Luka Clinical Center where Dr. Zeljko Rodic reported that the majority of the patients are from the Banja Luka area, and one patient is from Laktasi. He stressed that this is the largest epidemic of Q fever to be reported in that country. [View Source](#)

Russia: Suspected Tickborne Encephalitis in the Kemerovo Region

17 May – ProMED reported that 15 people have been admitted to hospital in Kuzbass (Kemerovo Region) with suspected [tickborne encephalitis](#), according to the latest figures supplied by the State Health Inspectorate's Regional Centre. Over 3000 local people have already sought medical help for tick bites. Out of that 3000, over 2000 have done so during the past week. The regional administration's press service stressed that the region has sufficient stocks of immunoglobulin: a total of 50,000 doses. About \$100,000 has been allocated from the regional and local budgets, as well as from the territorial compulsory medical insurance fund, to purchase immunoglobulin. [View Article](#)

USNORTHCOM

Anti-clotting Treatment Underused at Many Hospitals

17 May - EurekAlert reported that academic hospitals are more likely than community or Veteran's Administration (VA) hospitals to follow national guidelines for treating patients at risk for blood clots with aspirin or warfarin. Among patients diagnosed with heart attack, 84.3 percent of those studied received aspirin upon arrival at academic hospitals, while just 65.8 percent at community hospitals and 60.2 percent at VA hospitals received it. The only exception was that VA hospitals performed better in using drugs to prevent blood clots in patients with atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat that increases the risk for stroke. Additionally, low molecular weight heparin was used in only about 56 percent of patients with blood clots in the legs or phlebitis, an inflammation of the vessels in the legs. And, only 27 percent of patients were discharged on bridge therapy, in which the guidelines recommend heparin and warfarin together, despite a 4.1-day reduction in stay. About one-third of VA hospitals and less than one-third of academic hospitals discharged patients on bridge therapy, versus community hospitals which discharged patients on bridge therapy in about one-fifth of cases. [View Source](#)

CDC Announces New Goals and Organizational Design

14 May – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Julie Gerberding announced new goals and integrated operations that will allow the federal public health agency to have greater impact on the health of people around the world. The announcement evolved from an ongoing strategic development process called the Futures Initiative which began a year ago at CDC and has included hundreds of employees, other agencies, organizations, and the public. The CDC will align its priorities and investments under two overarching health protection goals: 1) Preparedness: All people in all communities will be protected from infectious, environmental, and terrorists threats. 2) Health Promotion and Prevention of Disease, Injury and Disability: All people will achieve their optimal lifespan with the best possible quality of health in every stage of life. In addition, the agency is developing more targeted goals to assure an improved impact on health at every stage of life including infants and toddlers, children, adolescents, adults, and older adults. [View Article](#)

USDA to Track Animal Disease

15 May – ProMED reported the Agriculture Department is about to start examining systems that could help it locate, within 48 hours, animals that might have [mad cow disease](#) or other infectious diseases. The department will spend \$18.8 million on the first phase of its multi-year animal identification program. The department will examine ways to label the places where animals live, such as farms, ranches, and feedlots. In the initial phase, the department will evaluate the pilot programs it currently funds, and look for others. Some pilot programs are studying equipment that would identify the animals, such as microchips that can be implanted in individual cattle. Others are creating databases to store records. The department expects that the facilities that keep the animals could start receiving their identification numbers later in 2004, with identification numbers for livestock possibly following shortly thereafter. [View Article](#)

VA Health Care Faces Wave of Returning GIs

17 May – The Washington Post reported more than 20,000 soldiers have sought care from the Veterans Affairs Department since returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. With thousands more

expected to seek benefits and health care, the VA faces its biggest challenge since the early 1990s. Nearly 18,000 soldiers who have returned from Iraq have sought care at VA health facilities, officials reported at the end of March. A separate report in mid-April said 4,000 troops from the war in Afghanistan sought care, although there is some overlap from those who served in both conflicts. About 60 percent of the Iraq veterans and 84 percent of those from Afghanistan who sought VA care came from the National Guard and Reserves. The most common problems affected joints and back, teeth and the digestive system. Mental disorders were diagnosed in 16 percent of the Afghanistan veterans and 15 percent of the Iraqi veterans. The statistics reflect medical conditions regardless of their origin. [View Article](#)

West Nile Virus Update:

12 May – ProMED reported in Louisiana, wild birds in 3 parishes tested positive for the [West Nile virus](#). The Office of Public Health in Shreveport also reported that two birds in Sabine Parish, and one in Webster Parish, have tested positive. The birds include sparrows, blue jays and cardinals. In Utah, 380 young chickens, once destined for a life in the hen house, brought a higher calling. The 16-week-old poults traded in egg-laying duties for front-line positions in the war against the West Nile virus. Mosquito control officials, gathered at the Utah County Department of Public Works campus, sent the sentinel chickens to dozens of destinations across Utah. Each chicken will be dropped into a mosquito-infested area to serve as an early-warning system for humans. If a West Nile mosquito feeds on one of the hens, the bird will develop certain antibodies. In Michigan, state officials say West Nile virus has made its first appearance of the year. Health authorities detected the virus in a dead crow found in the town of Tittabawassee Township, Saginaw County, in early May. [View Report](#)

USPACOM

Dhaka Breeding Epidemic by Not Treating Excreta

14 May - News from Bangladesh reported the capital runs the risk of raging epidemics with its groundwater being increasingly infested with hordes of disease germs from untreated human excreta, a seminar in the city said. The Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) currently can meet only 10% of the city's sewerage service needs, it was also revealed. The city's lack of means to treat excreta of its 10 million dwellers has given rise to a very high-risk health and hygiene situation. Managing Director of Dhaka WASA ANH Akhter Hossain said, "Recently a number of extremely harmful viruses and bacteria, including [Escherichia coli](#), have been detected on several occasions in the groundwater of Old Dhaka." [View Article](#)

Indonesian Dengue Epidemic Subsides after 58,000 Cases

14 May – ProMED reported the [dengue](#) fever epidemic in Indonesia has subsided after 58,301 cases were reported in four months, which rivaled the pandemic year of 1998, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). There were 658 deaths among cases of dengue fever and dengue hemorrhagic fever reported from January through April 2004, the WHO said. The case-fatality rate of 1.1 percent was lower than in previous years, officials said. A dengue pandemic in 1998 caused 1.2 million cases in 56 countries, the WHO reported. That year, Indonesia had 72,133 cases and 1414 deaths, the agency said. As in 1998, *Dengue 3* appeared to be the predominant virus serotype this year 2004. "At the end of April the situation has returned to normal with all provinces reporting cases at a low level," the WHO said. [View Article](#)

Japan: Rise in Rubella Cases May Indicate Outbreak

18 May – The Daily Yomiuri reported the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry has received a growing number of reports nationwide of people contracting [German measles](#) this year, prompting the implementation of further preventive measures. A report filed with the prefectural government numbered the cases at 1,126. The Ota municipal government has distributed flyers calling on people to take precautionary measures. As the number of infected people continued to rise, officials at the prefectural government's health division said it might not be possible to contain an outbreak. Outbreaks of German measles tend to occur every five years. There have been no major outbreaks since 1999, largely due to the increased number of vaccinations given to infants. According to surveys conducted at 3,000 pediatric medical facilities across the nation, the number of infected people each year since 2000 has remained at about 3,000. [View Article](#)

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Plague, Fatal - Ecuador (Chimborazo)

13 May – ProMED reported that the health department in Chimborazo province (located in the Andean mountains) advised local medical personnel that patients admitted from the town of Guamote presenting fever, cough, enlargement of the lymph nodes, weakness and malaise, should be considered as suspected cases of [bubonic plague](#). This decision was taken after confirming three fatal cases due to the disease in the last two months. The death of several guinea pigs (cuyes) has been reported in the community of San Pedro de Yaucupamba, where two human fatalities have already occurred. The disease is endemic in the region. The health authorities have also prohibited the consumption of guinea pigs and rabbits in the region until the transmission of the disease is controlled. The manipulation of flesh, consumption of poorly cooked guinea pigs, or the direct contact with the host or the infected fleas could potentially lead to human infection -- all reasons that the health authorities urge the elimination of guinea pigs, rabbits, and rats, especially in the areas from where the cases were reported. [View Article](#)

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POC: Lorraine Bell, DrPH, MSN
Lorraine.Bell@APG.amedd.army.mil

Eileen Resta
eileen.resta@amedd.army.mil

Approved:

[Kevin Delaney](#)

Chief, Health Information Operations
(410) 436-5217 or DSN 584-5217